

# A Farm Forever

## Preservation purchase of O'Neil farm complete

By KEITH L. MARTIN

Carl O'Neil's 60-year mission to save the family farm is now complete.

In the third grade, and with his grandparents struggling to keep their land, a classmate brought in a newspaper clipping announcing the sale of the property. Seeing the potential loss of his family's heritage on a piece of paper changed young O'Neil's life forever.

"It struck me to see that and from that day forward, it became my mission to save that farm," he said.

The Wildlands Trust completed their purchase of the 145-acre farm on Wednesday for \$2.24 million, including \$1.5 million from Duxbury's Community Preservation Act funds.

While no longer in the O'Neil family, the land will be used for agriculture forever, with conservation and agricultural preservation restrictions placed on the property for use as farmland in perpetuity.

Mark Primack, executive director of the Trust, called O'Neil "a visionary" who made the whole project pos-

sible, adding that the former Duxbury fire chief will continue to farm on the land for the rest of his life. O'Neil will also be a member of the farm corporation, that when formally established will be the owners and operators of the land.

"In a year or two, we'll see programs on the farm, such as public ways and trails and learning opportunities," said Primack. "We'll see the joys, the education, and the knowledge of agriculture this will give and the heritage of the O'Neil family will go on for a very, very long time."

O'Neil said that there have been a few ups and downs over the years in keeping the farm in the family and that with the sale complete, the feeling is somewhat bitter-sweet.

"I feel like I'm letting go of a part of my life, so that's the bitter," he said. "But this also worked out well for everyone in the future. The sky's the limit for agricultural education programs for children and residents of this area."

Selectman Andre Martecchini said that the town is excited with the purchase to preserve a tremendous amount of land in Duxbury.

"This is really a testimony to the amount of work done by the Wildlands Trust, Carl O'Neil and others," he said. "For their determination to get this done, I'm so thankful for all their efforts and look forward to continuing this."

Martecchini added that the purchase is also a great use of the town's Community Preservation Act funds, which helped defray the total purchase price of \$4.3 million paid to Carl O'Neil and his late brother Edward's heirs.

Last September, the Wildlands Trust paid \$1.45 million to Edward O'Neil's children and on Wednesday turned over a check for \$2.24 million to Carl O'Neil. The long-time farmer is donating some of his own proceeds to set up the charitable foundation that will oversee the farm and obtain the rights to the land from the Wildlands Trust once it is formally established.

The Historic O'Neil Farm, Inc. will operate the farm and run the educational components and public access through a board composed of Wildlands Trust designees, town representatives and others.

As part of the original agreement to obtain the land, however, the Trust is still obligated to raise \$400,000 to complete the transaction.

Primack said that a large reason for celebrating on Wednesday was the numerous volunteers from his organization and from surrounding towns who gave their all to the project, from standing out in freezing weather to sell commemorative milk bottles to conceiving the idea for the plywood cows to raise money and awareness for the farm's preservation.

"We raised almost two million dollars in private donations," he said. "That shows the generosity and the foresight for the future of this land by people. We had people who were generous and then people who were strongly generous...who gave every spare dollar they could and believed in the vision we painted for them."

With that in mind, Primack is hopeful that there are more donors out there who can help with the final step in preserving a farm that has been in existence since 1729 and will provide agriculture for years to come.

"This has really been a community and regional project," he said. "This is an educational and open space project, but more than anything, it's an agricultural project. This region was built on farming. From the minute the Pilgrims landed in this area, they took their living from the earth. It's where we all came from."

O'Neil has seen the effect that learning about farming can have on people, having youngsters from town work on the farm and years later having them come back to share their joy of days on his family's farm.

Others apparently shared that joy, not only approving funds at last year's Special Town Meeting, but also showing their support of the project for over a year, a fact not lost on O'Neil.

"I'm amazed with the community turnout, but knowing Duxbury, I wasn't surprised that much I guess," he said. "I was skeptical at some moments about this project, but I kept the faith. I knew this would be a good thing and I and the Trust wanted this to happen, so it did."

For more information on the Wildlands Trust and the O'Neil Farm preservation, go to [www.wildlandstrust.org](http://www.wildlandstrust.org).



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**MOVING MOMENT:** It was all smiles for town officials and others involved in the mission to save the O'Neil farm on Wednesday as the 145-acre property was officially purchased for preservation. On hand for the announcement were (l to r): Wildlands Trust Board of Directors President Howard Randall, Selectman Andre Martocchini, Wildlands Trust Executive Director Mark Primack, Carl O'Neil, and Selectman Betsy Sullivan.



At a reception on Wednesday Mark Primack of the Wildlands Trust offered a toast to all the individuals who helped preserve the O'Neil farm during.